

16 March 2020

Dear Vice Chancellor / College Principal

Staff in the post-16 education sectors are extremely concerned by the current piecemeal approach taken by individual institutions to the coronavirus – especially in light of the government’s newly announced advice, including to avoid all unnecessary travel and work from home where possible. I am writing to set out our immediate priorities for staff and students in this situation and what we are asking you as university and college leaders to do to address them.

UCU is calling for universities and colleges to take immediate steps to shut down their core functions, particularly those which involve face to face interaction or bringing large numbers of people together.

We do recognise that some university and college infrastructure should stay open including student accommodation and, where agreed with staff, medical research units. However, while the exact pattern of closures will vary depending upon the institution its parameters should be agreed with UCU and other staff trade unions which prioritise the safety of students and staff.

Where universities and colleges intend to move teaching and other face-to-face activity ‘online’, we expect that you will institute a pause to allow for consultation with UCU on the employment practicalities of such a policy; to give members of staff sufficient time to produce the necessary materials and trial whatever software is required; and, above all, to ensure that staff face no costs or detriments as a result of moving their work online.

We are also facing an increasing number of questions from members about working from home. This will need clear guidance and we ask again that you engage directly with UCU at an institution level to reach agreements with the union about this.

We expect that no staff or students will face detriment for isolating themselves or for any loss of teaching or research time as a result of actions taken by institutions. Specifically, we expect all temporary, fixed-term or other staff on casual contracts who self-isolate to be paid in line with their typical duties and workload irrespective of any interruption of their work and to be paid in full for any additional work that is requested of them.

We also wish to receive an undertaking from you that staff raising concerns about their own health and safety or that of their students will be given a clear and widely publicised channel through which to raise such issues. Where employers are

clearly failing to meet their health and safety obligations, we will defend our members' statutory right to remove themselves and their students from what they reasonably consider to be 'serious and imminent' danger.

Finally there are concerns for the implications of any closures from staff working on a visa and we would ask for your assurance that you will join with us on ensuring equitable treatment from the Home Office during this period and publicise widely the decision of the Government to suspend attendance requirements for those who fall ill as a result of the virus.

I hope we can work with you to provide the confidence needed for all staff and students at this time.

Yours,

Jo Grady
UCU general secretary